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BEN BOLLIG, Politics and Public Space in Contemporary Argentine Poetry: The Lyric and the State

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BEN BOLLIG, *Politics and Public Space in Contemporary Argentine Poetry: The Lyric and the State*. Literatures of the Americas Series. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 2016. vi + 279 pp.

Taking a broadly Cultural Studies approach to poetry, Bollig's detailed study explores to what extent there is a relationship between the contemporary poet and the state, contemporary here encompassing the 1990s onwards. He contextualizes his survey historically, bringing in the legacy of the 'proceso', and the political and economic crisis of 2001-2. The introduction (of which pp. 16-26 are drawn from Bollig's own previously published review article "'El libro era una cosa que ocupaba espacio" (Néstor Perlongher): Recent Works on Poetry, Publishing and Performance in the Southern Cone', *JLACS* 24:3, 2015, pp. 387-404) provides a useful overview of critical literature in the field, building on the work of Fondevberder and others, and highlighting new creative tendencies in publishing and dissemination. This section identifies four 'memorable figures' in particular: Néstor Perlongher, Washington Cucurto, Fernanda Laguna and – slightly unexpectedly – César Aira.

Of the six chapters that follow, the first is particularly valuable in its comprehensive examination of the 'Spaces and Circuits of Contemporary Argentine Poetry', drawing on the author's first-hand experiences of the various cultural spaces and fora in which poetry – despite the 'relative absence of state and market' (33) to support it – has emerged and indeed flourishes. Among these 'Spaces and Circuits', a phrase Bollig borrows from Néstor García Canclini's 2013 study of young cultural workers, he discusses, for example, independent publishers (38) including artisanal, 'cartonera' and online publication, 'Estación Pringles' (44), Slam poetry events (45), Movimiento Acción Poética (47), and cooperative ventures or 'gestión mixta' (51) involving varying degrees of state sponsorship.

The other five chapters, some reworking the author's own earlier articles or papers, focus on a poet apiece, namely Martín Gambarotta, Sergio Raimondi, Andi Nachon, Ezequiel Zaidenweg and Marina Yuszczuk, and taken together present us with 'a diachronic study of [Argentine] poetry in the 1990s and 2000s' (26). The rationale for inclusion of these particular poets is a combination of 'formal innovation, political work, and novel means of diffusion' (27), linking 'aesthetic choices to the types of social engagement undertaken by poets' (39).

The study perfectly balances close readings of individual poems and their related intertexts with overview of the poets' trajectories to date, including careful consideration of their political and cultural interventions. Bollig charts Martín Gambarotta's project of 'putting language under strain' (76) weighing up the balance between 'difficulty and accessibility' (57). He interprets Andi Nachon's work through various lenses including psychogeography and sci-fi, examining how it breaks down binaries of 'inside/outside, public/private, you/I' (172). In the chapter on Sergio Raimondi, he raises very pertinent issues of the role of historical genres in the contemporary literary sphere, the 'persistence of poetry, even in unpoetic situations' (111) and the relationship between work, production and literature (136-7), exemplified in close analysis of Raimondi's use of Shelley and the Romantics to rethink contemporary poetry's inescapable relationship with economic realities (116-17). He singles out Ezequiel Zaidenweg as representing more traditional poetic values and prosodic forms in contrast to other contemporary trends, and carefully elucidates the many classical

and other literary references in Zaidenweg's poems. The reading of Marina Yuszczuk's *Madre soltera* is duly sensitive to the current context of reproductive rights issues in Argentina (232-33) and to the historical politicization of motherhood in Argentina (216) as well as to the life experiences it explores.

Overall the study provides a fascinating and comprehensive survey of the back and forth between contemporary poetry and public space(s) in Argentina, interweaving this with an impressive breadth of reference to poetic traditions beyond the national.

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